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### COMMON versus PROPER.

BY ANNIE TRUMBULL SLOSSON.

Entomologists differ now, as they have always differed, as to the advisability and practicability of having a popular and simple as well as a scientific and technical nomenclature in their own branch of natural history. I will not enter into the general question here, but simply relate a few incidents in my own experience as a collector which seem to bear upon the matter.

I have a collection of insects, principally Lepidoptera. In it are certain rare and interesting things, as some of you know. There are some types, several uniques, and many fine series, showing gradations, varieties, seasonal and climatic differences in certain species. All these insects, with very few exceptions, have been taken by myself personally, or by friends interested in adding to my treasures; for I do not acquire specimens by exchange or purchase. And I can safely say that my collection would be far smaller, infinitely less valuable and interesting, had I been one of those who confine themselves strictly to the use of scientific and polysyllabic appellations in speaking of my favorites. A few illustrations will show you what I mean. I spend a great deal of time among the northern hills of New England. I am there often in the spring time before the summer guests arrive, often in the quiet autumn days when tourists and boarders have gone to their city homes. At such times my only friends and companions are the villagers themselves. These are intelligent, appreciative people, but not what we call liberally educated. They know no Greek or Latin and could not easily learn even the dreadful mixture of tongues which passes for these languages in the nomenclature of entomology. But they possess, many of them,

keen powers of observation, a true love of nature and a bountiful stock of that patience and persistence which all fishermen, hunters and woodsmen so readily learn. So there is the material of which to make admirable collectors. But first they must be taught a few things; must be shown what I want and for what I do not care. How shall I do this? Shall I tell the simple souls that my desiderata are Lepidoptera, particularly the Heterocera, that I am just now especially interested in the Bombycidæ and the Notodontians? No, by so doing I should at once scare away my neophytes and lose all chance of making them useful to me. I dare not even ask them to capture "moths" for me. Few of them apply that term to anything but the devouring insects which eat their buffalo robes, their coonskin coats, the braided rugs upon their floors, their flowering plants or garden vegetables. Be the pest tineid, hemipter or coleopter, he is to the farmer in that north country a "moth;" even the potato-bug and the Buffalo beetle are "moths" in their vocabulary. But they know what "millers" are. So throwing science to the wind—temporarily—and casting aside all entomological traditions, I descend (ought I not to say rise?) to their level and boldly own myself a collector of millers. But a new difficulty arises, I do not want all millers. That is, I do not care to acquire all the specimens of one species to be found in that locality. So after a hundred or more of some common insect like *Spilosoma virginica* are brought me I go a step farther in my instructions and give orders that no more "white millers" are to be gathered. But I soon find that this again is too broad and embraces too much. One of my country boys throws aside as worthless a *Euchætes collaris*. Then I begin to show my pupils the more striking distinctions between the various white moths. Very soon they know them apart and have their own name for each, given because of some peculiarity of marking or habit which they themselves discover or to which I call their attention. Then *Spilosoma virginica* becomes the "common white miller," *Spilosoma prima* the "dirty-white miller," *Hyphantria textor*, the "littlest white miller." For *Leucarctia acræa* I give them Harris's old name of the "Saltmarsh miller," a term which is at once shortened and put into local dialect by my pupils and thus becomes the "ma'sh miller." Last summer when absent from the mountains I remembered the request made by an eminent entomologist then interested in examination of the scent organs of insects, that I would save him in alcohol specimens of *Leucarctia acræa*. So I wrote to one of my best collectors in the north

country, good, simple-hearted, enthusiastic Sim L. to attend to the matter for me. Now I did not ask him to capture and preserve specimens of *Leucarcia acraea* Drury male. He would not have understood me, and I should not have obtained what I wanted, but I wrote: "Dear Sim, Catch me a lot of 'ma'sh millers,'" and Sim took the job and carried it to a successful conclusion. I shudder to think what Messrs. A. and B. and C. our well-known, sincere and earnest supporters of the doctrine that only scientific and authorized names should be applied to described species, would say should they hear some of our entomological talks in those northern regions. "What luck last night, Sim?" I ask some morning in July. "Dreffe poor, Mis' Slosson," says my honest friend; "everlastin' lot o' millers, but all on 'em common. Guess I took nigh on to a dozen browneys, more'n that o' blackeys, and a heap o' chestnuts. Never ketched a single nice thing but one drinker, and you've got plenty o' him. I see a modest miller an' struck at him, but he got away." "Want any niggers, Mis' Slosson?" calls out my little neighbor Billy B., his freckled face glowing with excitement and hope. "There's a bustin' lot on 'em round them posies in my backyard." And I know, as well as if I had seen them myself, that that day-flying, sunloving Zygaenid, *Ctenucha virginica*, is sipping honey from Mrs. B.'s petunias.

Bumblebee moths, big-grays, little-reds, scallops, fattys, fussys, shutter-millers, bowlin' alley moths—these and many more are the unscientific, but suggestive names given to the Lepidoptera of the mountains, by my young collectors. And in other orders, there are shinin' bug, the mud beetle, big horns, prickly legs, sidewalk bug, humpy, straddly beetle, flat nose, dead-rat bug, etc., etc. In fact, we have a vocabulary of our own, I and my collectors, one we fully understand, and by means of which I secure many and fine specimens unattainable there by the use of more scientific terms. And the "Catalogue of described insects of northern New Hampshire, prepared by Sim L., Billy B. *et al*," is just as valuable and important to me as are the lists of Grote, Henshaw, Scudder, Osten Sacken, Cresson and Uhler.

In Florida I use a different language. There the colored race take an eager interest in our collecting. To them my moths are no longer millers, but generally can'le flies, because, I suppose, of their flying to light of candle or lamp. "Want a can'le fly, missy?" cry the shrill voices of the dark-faced, bright-eyed little chaps, running on bare, brown feet to bring a big cossid or arctian. "Here, boss, here's a right smart heap o' can'le flies

roun' this light." Again, to some of this imaginative race, moths are "bats." I was once formally introduced by one of my ebony friends in Tampa, to a dusky companion, as "De missy what cotches bats." And I did not resent the title but owned the soft impeachment. On another occasion while I was watching a friend plying his net at an electric light in Jacksonville, I overheard one little darkey say to his mate: "Yer know what that gemman do'n over thar? He jes' cotchin' them poo' li'le can'le flies, put 'em in a bottle an' make camphire out 'n 'em." Deplorably ignorant you see of the first principles of entomology, knowing nothing of Hübnerian terms, the laws of priority, of Linnæus, Fabricius, Guenée, Say, and their respective claims to originality. In fact, they are utterly lacking in the knowledge of all these things about which you learned scientists love to wrangle. But they are sharp-eyed, nimble-footed, light-handed, and they capture many a rare, desirable insect, just as acceptable to me by their names of crawler, flopper, doodle-bug, snake-doctor or stick-in-the-mud as if bearing a two-tongued appellation in "linked sweetness long drawn out," and understood only by the favored few.

But it is not only in conversation with the simple and unlearned that I have found the use of popular names advisable if not absolutely necessary. You may not believe it, but there are actually some educated and accomplished men and women, scholars in various branches of art, science and literature quite removed from our particular field, who do not care to spend the rest of their days in acquiring a new language, or jargon. Such an one I have now in mind. He is an admirable collector and it is to him I owe many, very many of my rarest specimens. He is quite capable of committing to memory the scientific names of our entomological lists, but he has something else to do with his time and brains. So he gives the insects he finds, or looks for, names of his own coining. At this moment I can recall but a few. Such are Proteus for that inconstant and variable geometer, *Hyperetis amicaria*; the scalloped sphinx, for *Paonias excæcatus*, and glowing-eye for a large noctuid whose eyes shine in the darkness like rubies or garnets. He talks familiarly of the checkered moth (*Halisidota maculata*); the New York moth (*Orgyia leucostigma*); the grass moth (*Drasteria*); the falcon-moth (*Platypteryx*); in all of which titles you who are lepidopterists will see a certain appropriateness. Again he will catch at the real scientific name and falling into the natural error we entomologists so soon discard, that these names have always some legitimate meaning, or correct

derivation, he gives them a free translation, and we have the senator (*Anisota senatoria*); the twin (*Smerinthus geminatus*); the minister (*Datana ministra*). Or, twisting the correct name a bit he gives it thus a more familiar sound. So he always calls the pretty little sub-alpine geometer, *Baptria albovittata*, the Baptist. Shall I ever forget the look of perplexed horror on the face of a good old man of the Free Will Baptist persuasion, as he heard this enthusiastic but unconventional collector announce one day that he had caught a lot of ministers, bottled one senator and pinned three little Baptists! But I understand him perfectly, and we hold most satisfactory entomological conversation and correspondence. Thus I obtain from him, as I said before, by the means of this vocabulary of home-made names, rare and desirable insects which I should lose I am sure if I asked for them, or spoke of them only by the long, often meaningless terms which he has no patience or leisure to learn.

I draw no conclusions here, you see; I propound no well defined theory. I tell you some simple little incidents, only a few out of hundreds of similar ones in my experience.

In making your plans for popularizing entomology, for drawing into the study young and old, wise and unlearned, perhaps these illustrations of mine may not lack suggestiveness. And you may, perchance, consider the advisability of giving, as do the entomologists of England, Germany and other lands, a simple, popular name to each and every insect, as well as its more scientific titles. Why should we not, in time, have an Index Entomologicus, like that of Wood, where side by side, stand the two names, the easy and the difficult, the simple and the scientific?



## AUCTION SALE OF INSECTS.

Recently an auction sale of insects was held at the residence of Mr. B. Neumoege, for the benefit of the publication fund of the Journal of the New York Entomological Society. The material for this purpose was contributed by members. About one thousand Coleoptera and Lepidoptera were sold. The prices realized for some specimens was very encouraging. A single example of *Spilosoma prima* brought \$4.25; a pair of *Seirarctia echo* \$1.50; a specimen of *Gyascutus cuneatus*, \$1.25. Other species brought equally good prices, upon which we will report later.